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WORK IN PROGRESS REPORT

Examining Adolescents' Well-being: How Do the Orientations to Happiness Relate to Their Leisure Time Activities?

Lisa Wagner*, Daniela Conrad†, Najdana Gajić‡, Ondřej Kácha§, Katarina Martinović||, Aleksandrina Skvortsova¶, Lotte van Doeselaar** and Darja Voitenko††

Three ways of achieving happiness—*life of pleasure*, *life of engagement*, and *life of meaning* (Seligman, 2002)—have been examined among adult samples. However, very few studies have investigated these orientations to happiness in non-adult populations. Numerous studies have found that different ways of spending leisure time affect the psychological well-being of adolescents. Bringing these two perspectives together, the aim of the present study is to identify the extent to which orientations to happiness are related to well-being and choice of leisure time activities in a sample of adolescents from eight European countries.

Keywords: orientations to happiness; free time; leisure; well-being; adolescence

Editor's Note

This work in progress report (WiP) was developed by the 2013–2014 cohort of the Junior Researcher Programme (JRP), a service supported by the European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA). During the course of the JRP calendar, the six research groups that are initiated via the European Summer School submit the WiPs of their research to the Journal of European Psychology Students (JEPS). The WiPs are short methodology papers that outline steps undertaken by research groups in developing and carrying out a research project in the context of low-resource, independent, student-driven, cross-cultural research. The WiPs are submitted prior to project completion to enable the authors to improve their research according to the comments resulting from the peer-review process. WiPs also support the dissemination of methods used by student-driven, independent research

projects, with the hope of informing others carrying out such work.

The 2013–2014 cohort was inducted into the JRP at the European Summer School 2013, held in Voeren, Belgium.

Introduction

Seligman (2002) proposed three distinct ways of achieving happiness, or more generally well-being. First, by living a *life of pleasure*, characterized by maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Second, by living a *life of meaning*, which entails identifying one's virtues, cultivating them and living in accordance with them in the service of the greater good. Third, well-being can be obtained by pursuing a *life of engagement*, which refers to being highly involved in what one does.

Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) introduced a self-report questionnaire that assesses the degree to which an individual pursues pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Orientations to Happiness; OTH). Each of the three orientations were found to individually predict life satisfaction from a small (pleasure) to a moderate (engagement, meaning) degree. Furthermore, persons with high values in all three OTH subscales ("full life") reported significantly higher life satisfaction than respondents with low scores on all three subscales ("empty life"). Park, Peterson, and Ruch (2009) found evidence of similarities and differences in orientations to happiness across cultures. The happiest nation depended on the type of happiness measured (e.g., Switzerland scored highest on engagement and South Korea highest on meaning). Additionally, Ruch, Harzer, Proyer, Park, and Peterson (2010) found that individuals who scored higher in one of the three orientations spent more time planning and pursuing activities which correspond to their dominant orientation to happiness. This

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may be because individuals choose to get involved in activities with characteristics (e.g., amount of effort and pleasure) in accordance with their predominant orientation to happiness, and reflecting what they identify as important for their well-being. Little is known about orientations to happiness among adolescents. Knowledge about how the different ways of achieving happiness relate to general well-being and to outcomes in different life domains (e.g., family, school, and leisure) could contribute significantly to the body of research on adolescents' well-being. The relation between OTH and leisure time activities has not yet been studied in adolescents, although leisure time activities are known to play an important role for the positive psychological development of adolescents (e.g., Caldwell & Smith, 2006).

In the area of leisure time activities, structured and unstructured activities are distinguished as they have been found to be differentially related to well-being (e.g., Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson, & Winefield, 2010). Structured activities are organized around specific social or behavioral goals (e.g., participation in sport clubs). They are assumed to positively affect subjective well-being as they involve challenge and concentration, are intrinsically motivated, and contribute to the development of adolescents' skills (Kleiber, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1986). Unstructured activities (e.g., watching TV or socializing with friends) may have maladaptive consequences in terms of subjective well-being, as they have been related to substance use (Trainor et al., 2010), aggression, delinquency, and susceptibility to peer pressure (Flannery, Williams, & Vazsonyi, 1999). Nevertheless, unstructured activities may provide relaxation and recovery of energy necessary for challenging structured activities (e.g. Zuzanek, 2005).

Apart from perceived structure, the characteristics of perceived effort and amount of social contact of leisure time activities were also found to be positively related to psychosocial adjustment (Bradley & Inglis, 2012). These characteristics may not be completely independent of each other, however, most studies lack a differentiation of the latter two dimensions and therefore may overestimate the effects of structure.

Together these findings suggest a relationship between characteristics of different leisure time activities and subjective well-being. However, many studies are limited by their narrow focus on particular groups of leisure activities (e.g., sports and socializing). Moreover, each study defined activities using different criteria, making it difficult to generalize across studies. For instance, Barber, Eccles, and Stone (2001) defined sports as only team sports, while Zuzanek (2005) included almost every physical activity. In the present study, we will therefore focus on the characteristics of structure, perceived effort and amount of social contact during activities. To gain a more detailed understanding of the relations, we will also explore to which extent adolescents experience pleasure, engagement, and meaning when they engage in leisure time activities. In addition, we will control for personality traits as they are known to be of predictive value for well-being as well as for choice of leisure time activities (Yeung & Hemsley, 1997).

The aims of the present study are to investigate whether adolescents' orientations to happiness are linked to (a) their well-being and (b) their leisure time activities, and (c) how the characteristics of leisure time activities are related to well-being. Since leisure time activities may shape adolescents' lives, this study will also investigate (d) whether the link between the orientations to happiness and well-being is mediated by the characteristics of these activities.

Methods

A cross-sectional, survey-based design will be used to address these research questions. Adolescents from eight European countries will be asked to respond to a number of questionnaires. Questionnaires will be presented online in a classroom setting. This procedure guarantees efficient data collection and reduces the self-selection bias often occurring within snowball-based recruitment of internet samples.

Participants

Participants will be students of schools with higher educational levels in urban areas (ages 14 to 17 years) from eight European countries: Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Serbia, and Switzerland. By including schools with higher educational levels and recruiting participants across comparable grades, we aim to collect data from comparable samples across different countries. Our goal is to collect data from at least 100 and up to 300 adolescents in each country, in total about 1600 participants.

Testing and data collection

Participants will fill in online questionnaires individually in the classroom. Data will be collected through an internet-based tool for surveys. We expect the testing to last around 30 minutes. The researchers, who will be present during the procedure, will instruct the participants on how to fill in the survey. After the data collection two participants in each country will be drawn to obtain a motivational prize (two cinema tickets).

Measures

Data will be obtained through questionnaires consisting of published and validated scales, with some slight adaptations. Several questionnaires were not available in all seven languages and therefore had to be translated. This was done by a process of translation and back-translation. Furthermore, since most questionnaires were designed for adults, we had to ensure that adolescents understood all items correctly. To achieve this goal, each researcher interviewed two native speaking adolescents independently about their understanding of the items. Necessary adaptations made during the process of translation or based on the interviews were documented and discussed by the researchers. Adaptations in all languages were fit to one another, to make sure that every translation will measure the same concepts, and that the items do not differ substantially between the languages.

Well-being. Three aspects of well-being will be assessed with the following measures. For all three instruments, participants will be asked to rate the items in regard to the past several weeks. Firstly, the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS; Huebner, 1991) is used to measure global life satisfaction in adolescents. The SLSS is a 7-item scale (sample item "My life is going well"). Items are rated on a 6-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). It is a reliable and well-validated measure of adolescents' life satisfaction (Huebner, 1991). Secondly, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) is used to assess mental well-being. It is suitable for use with teenagers aged 13 years and over. The WEMWBS consists of 14 items (e.g., "I've been feeling relaxed") that are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all of the time*). The scale has shown to be reliable and valid (Tennant et al., 2007). Thirdly, the Positive and Negative Affective Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) provides a self-assessment of positive (PA) and negative (NA) general activated affective states. There are 10 adjectives each for NA (such as afraid, ashamed, and nervous) and for PA (such as strong, proud, and interested). Respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced the affective states within the past several weeks on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The PANAS is reliable and has a strong reported validity with measures such as general distress and dysfunction (Watson et al., 1988).

Orientations to Happiness. The Orientations to Happiness scale (Peterson et al., 2005) measures three distinct pathways to well-being: the life of pleasure, the life of engagement and the life of meaning. Each of three ways of seeking happiness is measured by six items, on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not like me at all*) to 5 (*very much like me*). A sample item for the life of engagement scale is: "I am always very absorbed in what I do". The scale has been reported to be reliable and valid (Peterson et al., 2005).

Personality. The Mini-International Personality Item Pool (Mini IPIP; Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006) is used to measure the Big Five personality traits. Neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness are assessed with four items each. Each item describes a behavior (e.g., "Am the life of the party") and participants are instructed to indicate how accurate this phrase is for them, using a 5-point scale from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). The scale's psychometric properties are satisfactory and equal to those from well-established longer measures of personality (Donnellan et al., 2006).

Leisure time activities. Following the procedure used by Bradley and Inglis (2012), participants will be asked to indicate up to four leisure time activities that they do the most. For each activity, participants will be asked to rate on a 6-point scale to which extent this activity involves social contact (from *I always do it alone* to *I always do it with others*), requires effort (from *It requires no effort and/or skill when I do it* to *It requires heaps of effort and/or skill when I do it*), and is structured (from *It has no rules, time-limits, uniforms, etc. when I do it* to *It has heaps of rules, time-limits, uniforms, etc. when I do it*). Furthermore,

participants will report on six items to which degree they experience each leisure time activity as pleasurable, engaging, and meaningful (e.g., "My involvement in this activity matters to others"). For each of these items a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) will be used.

Strategy of analysis

With the aimed dataset, multiple research questions can be answered using different analyses mainly consisting of structural equation modeling. In a first step, it will be tested whether the translation of questionnaires led to measurement invariant instruments across the eight countries. Moreover, since research showed that both a variable- and a person-centered approach are valuable in examining the OTH (Peterson et al., 2005), the analyses will follow both approaches. Within the variable-centered approach we will examine associations between each OTH and the other variables, with some of the research questions being addressed by mediational models. Within the person-centered approach we will perform a cluster analysis and examine whether clusters of profiles of the three OTH (e.g., high values on all three orientations) can be identified. Subsequently, we will examine whether members of these clusters differ in their leisure time activities and well-being.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted after first submission of the proposal by a standing research ethics committee in an accredited university psychology department. The approval was sufficient for all collaborators. Given the different guidelines for conducting studies in schools, the specific administrative procedures for obtaining approval from the schools varied for each country. For instance, in Germany additional permission by the regional council was needed. After a school has given permission to collect data, each participating student will be asked to give written informed consent. According to national regulations, active or passive parental consent will be requested additionally.

Practical Considerations

In order to make this independent international project successful, special attention has to be paid to several issues. To facilitate the working process, our research team is divided into two groups. One group is responsible for the theoretical part and the other group for the methodological and statistical part. Two project managers are responsible for leading the two groups, while the communication officer oversees the communication between groups. The whole project—content and implementation—is supported by the supervisor. Team members are kept involved in the entire project by at least monthly meetings with the whole team on Skype and are reviewing each other's work.

As our project receives no funding, we try to keep expenses minimal. For instance, we are using a free version of a web-based tool for the online questionnaires. The team members cover small expenses, such as the cinema tickets that are raffled among participants.

Current status of the project

By now, all questionnaires have been translated into the languages of the participating countries and, where necessary, adapted for use with adolescents. Questionnaires have also been uploaded to a web-based tool for building surveys, and are ready for use. Researchers are currently engaged in contacting the schools where they are going to examine adolescents. The next step is data collection, scheduled to take place between February and April.

Prospective discussion

The results of the study will contribute to the understanding of the relation between adolescents' orientations to happiness, leisure time activities, and well-being. Possible limitations of the study include the cross-sectional design of the study and the challenge to generate comparable samples across the different countries.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our study has potential to enlarge the scientific knowledge about adolescents' well-being. In addition, we aim to give feedback to participating schools, to thank them for their participation, but also to maximize the potential impact of the study. Study results and short recommendations drawn from the study will not only be provided to schools, but also to students and parents that indicated their interest during the data collection. In the best case, the conclusions drawn from the study will inspire future research as well as encourage schools and parents to provide leisure time activities that have the potential to enhance adolescents' well-being.

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